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PBS MACNEIL-LEHRER REPORT
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PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: We're not planning a war, and we don't think they're, that that's going to happen at all.

MACNEIL: The contrast between President Reagan's soft words and his military muscle-flexing sharpens the debate about where he's headed in Central America.

MACNEIL: Good evening. Whatever its impact on the American public, President Reagan's assurance last night that he seeks peace in Central America did not silence his critics in Congress. In fact, his televised news conference appeared to fan the flames of debate. A parade of high-level Democrats attacked the president's statements. House Speaker O'Neill said Mr. Reagan was playing with matches. Major Leader Jim Wright said the sea and land maneuvers the president has ordered around Nicaragua marked a return to gunboat diplomacy. The criticisms were echoed in hours of heated debate today as the House of Representatives moved towards a vote tomorrow on cutting off covert aid to Nicaraguan rebels. One of the points that fueled new controversy was the president's assertion that the planned maneuvers were routine.
REAGAN: And let me set the record straight on what these exercises are and what they are not. Essentially, there will be two sets of practice training in coming months: One, a series of ground exercises in Honduras with the combined forces of Honduras and the United States; second, a series of ocean exercises with our own fleet. The latest exercises with Honduras took place earlier this year. Much larger scale exercises have taken place in Europe, Asia and Latin America. There is no comparison with Vietnam, and there's not going to be anything of that kind in this. And maybe the people are disturbed because the confused pattern of, that has been presented to them and the constant drumbeat with regard to the fact that, of suspicion that somehow there is an ulterior purpose in this.

MACNEIL: Tonight, what do the exercises say about Mr. Reagan's intentions in Central America, and will the Congress support them? Jim Lehrer is off tonight. Charlayne Hunter-Gault is in Washington. Charlayne?

HUNTER-GAULT: Robin, routine or not, the military exercises planned for Central America are definitely large-scale. The land, sea and air maneuvers which started Monday when the first aircraft carrier arrived in Central American waters will last until the end of the year. In Operation Big Pine, the administration plans to have some 4,000 soldiers aid the Honduran military in communications training, small patrols and artillery operations. At sea, the aircraft carrier Ranger was diverted from a planned cruise in the western Pacific. It carries over 70 aircraft and travels with a battle group that includes seven other ships. It will reportedly be joined in the Pacific by another battle group led by the reactivated battleship New Jersey, now off Southeast Asia. Press reports from the Pentagon indicate that the U.S.S. Coral Sea, now stationed with the Mediterranean fleet, will take up station along the Caribbean coast off Honduras. The naval task forces will simulate a blockade, or quarantine, off Nicaragua, but the administration says the fleet will remain well out to sea, in international waters. For a look at the implications of these military exercises, we talk first with retired Admiral Stansfield Turner, former CIA director. Admiral Turner has commanded carrier task forces in the South Atlantic and Mediterranean oceans. (sic) Admiral, are these maneuvers routine? TURNER: Not in my book, Charlayne. There's, these are unprecedented in size for Central America. Two

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